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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

THE CHANGED POLITICAL SCENE IN INDONESIA

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

Office of Current Intelligence

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Changed Political Scene in Indonesia

Summary

1. It is now apparent that the abortive coup of 1 October has brought Indonesia to a major turning point in its history. The era of Sukarno's dominance has ended. Sukarno's power had been based first on his personality and his great prestige as the embodiment of Indonesian nationalism, and second on his ability to play off against one another Indonesia's major power factors, in recent years primarily the Indonesian Communist Party and the army. In the last three months his prestige has been seriously eroded; he is less the father and political hub of the country and more the petulant old man. More important, the political balance has been significantly changed: the army has virtually destroyed the PKI. The political upheaval has not solved any of Indonesia's basic problems, however, and the army's ability to deal with them cannot be rated very high on the basis of past performance.

Introduction

2. President Sukarno has been the focal point of Indonesia for the 20 years that followed the country's declaration of independence from the Dutch in 1945. As he moved politically, he carried the entire national structure with him. Moving consistently to the left, he encouraged the growth of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). By identifying itself with Sukarno and by securing his tolerance, and later, support, the PKI grew from a discredited minority party to the most powerful civilian organization in the country. In 1965 it claimed three million members and the support of some 15 million more persons

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in its front groups. The only body which had the capability and inclination to check the Communists was the army. Army leaders, although personally anti-Communist, were also loyal to Sukarno and reluctantly followed him in his leftist course. Over the years, their hope of changing political trends in Indonesia lay in the possibility that the PKI might challenge Sukarno or the state in such a way that they could take retaliatory action.

3. By September 1965, the way appeared clear for phased Communist accession to power with Sukarno's approval. The political atmosphere was one of leftist totalitarianism. Moderate civilian elements were largely paralyzed and discredited. Opportunistic non-Communists, of whom the most notable was Foreign Minister Subandrio, feverishly curried Communist favor. Army leaders mouthed Sukarno's extreme nationalist and pro-Communist line but put up some resistance to the President's and the PKI's efforts to increase Communist influence within the army itself. The army, however, appeared to be losing the battle.

The Coup Attempt

4. This situation was almost completely reversed, however, by the army's prompt and forceful reaction to the coup attempt which took place on 1 October. The coup, promoted by a group that called itself the "30 September movement," involved Communist elements and may have been master-minded by the party. The facts behind the coup--which took the lives of six top army generals--are not fully known, but the army has promoted the explanation that the coup was a Communist attempt to overthrow the state, and on this basis has ruthlessly persecuted party leaders and members.

5. The army leaders are convinced that Sukarno himself was deeply involved in the coup, and their previous loyalty to him has given way to active distrust. Although clearly in the political ascendancy, they have nevertheless refrained from publicly implicating the President in the 30 September movement and have made no effort to remove him from office. Sukarno, for his part, has reluctantly agreed to the prosecution of coup elements, but he continues to parry army demands that he ban the PKI.

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The Army's Widening Role

6. The military, and the army in particular, have clearly emerged as the most powerful force in Indonesia. Whether or not the surviving army leaders foresaw the consequences of the coup and of their response to it, the logic of the situation has thrust the military into an ever more predominant position. Sukarno's refusal to cooperate fully with the army and his constant but ineffective criticism may well have forced it to assume a broader role simply to protect itself from a possible counter-attack. Some sort of fuzzy Javanese-style compromise between the military and the President is still possible, but it daily becomes less likely. Indeed, the army, as it grasps the reins of power more firmly, may no longer feel the need for compromise. Nor does the military seem disposed to abdicate its present power in favor of the traditional political parties. It has used anti-Communist political elements to further its own ends but thus far has refrained from treating these groups as its equal. The army, like Sukarno, has over the years shown considerable distrust and contempt for the often quarrelsome and ineffectual traditional politicians.

7. In the past month especially, the army has thrust itself into a widening range of governmental activities. Defense Minister Nasution and Army Chief Suharto have been speaking authoritatively on a great variety of subjects, some having only the most tenuous connection with military or security affairs. After initial hesitation, the army forced a reorganization of the Supreme Operations Command (KOTI), which now has responsibility in nearly all phases of Indonesian political life and appears to be emerging as a kind of "super cabinet." The army dominates this organization as it is now constituted. The military is also maintaining close control over the Indonesian information media.

8. The other branches of the armed services have fallen in step with the army. The navy has given wholehearted support to the army's initiatives from the beginning. Although air force elements--in particular the former commander, Dani--were implicated in the insurrection, this service is now acting vigorously to weed out PKI suspects from its ranks. The new air force commander, Muljano Herlambang

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[redacted] now appears to be cooperating closely with Generals Nasution and Suharto in this connection and has made suitable anti-PKI noises in recent weeks. In these circumstances Sukarno has had little opportunity to employ the tactic of divide and rule--a device he has often used in the past to keep the military subservient to his will.

PKI and Communism

9. The danger of a PKI take over in Indonesia has been dissipated, probably for many years. The party as it has existed in the recent past is a spent political force. Nearly every member of the PKI Politburo has been arrested; many have already been executed, including the three top party leaders, Aidit, Lukman, and Njoto. The party's communications have been effectively disrupted, and outlying PKI branches, lacking direction from the center, have been forced to fend for themselves. The party's mass organizations have been paralyzed and virtually put out of business.

10. Although the PKI has not been banned throughout Indonesia, this action, for immediate practical purposes, would be largely a formality. Army commanders have on their own initiative outlawed the party in more than half the country's provinces. Although for the moment, the PKI clandestine apparatus is largely leaderless, it probably retains the capacity for at least limited sabotage. However, the army no longer fears full-scale PKI insurgency. Repression of the PKI has led to large-scale defections from the party, and these are likely to continue. In addition, the slaughter of PKI members and sympathizers in North Sumatra, East and Central Java, and Bali is continuing.

11. Nevertheless, Marxist and specifically Communist ideas still have some currency in Indonesia. A rapid shift away from the jargon and many of the attitudes of the past several years is not likely. Despite President Sukarno's repeated assertion that "Indonesia cannot exist without Communism," however, the army has made it clear that it will not brook the establishment of a new party replacing the PKI in all but name. In the short run, at least, the military should be able to make this decision stick.

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12. The PKI now appears to have no future except as a lean, highly revolutionary clandestine party along lines frequently advocated by Peking. But a clandestine party whose hand is set against the existing regime is one that any government, even one espousing principles not dissimilar to those of Yugoslavia, must perforce suppress as thoroughly as possible. In this respect, Egypt and Syria offer interesting examples. A deep antagonism between the remnants of the PKI and the Army-led Indonesian Government for the foreseeable future therefore seems inevitable.

Sukarno's Present Status

13. As the power of the army has grown, that of Sukarno has declined. Once the unchallenged master of Indonesian affairs, the President now finds himself increasingly shunted aside. His advice is being ignored; his statements appear to have no effect on the course of events. His remarks are heavily edited and sometimes distorted in the army-controlled press; the Indonesian radio has on occasion seen fit not to broadcast even an abbreviated version of his speeches. The speeches themselves, the US Embassy reports, appear to have little impact on his audiences. The President often sounds shrill and petulant, and he seems increasingly out of touch with political reality. He appears unable effectively to protect his political friends.

14. Sukarno, of course, is still trying to keep the KOM in NASAKOM, his acronym for nationalism, religion, and Communism, the "pillars" of the Indonesian revolution. However, there seems little chance that he will be able either to save the present PKI or to resurrect the party under another name in the near future. The President is fearful that with the demise of the PKI the leftward course of "his" revolution will be slowed or reversed. But the destruction of the PKI has also meant the dissolution of the most disciplined, dynamic and tightly organized party in Indonesia, and this in itself distresses Sukarno. The President--himself unaffiliated with any political organization--no longer has at his disposal a mass party to support all his ideas and theories, and there is no longer an important political force available for him to balance off against the army.

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15. These developments not only have greatly reduced Sukarno's political leverage; they also appear to have had an effect on the President's frame of mind. His frequent displays of pique seem to reflect a growing loss of self-confidence. By objective standards Sukarno has been reduced to a position that is scarcely more than a figurehead chief of state. General Suharto--whom Sukarno himself now calls "caretaker of the Indonesian situation"--apparently has gained a degree of personal ascendancy over the President and can frequently secure Sukarno's acquiescence to army measures on a wide range of subjects. Sukarno's only initiative in recent weeks has been the revaluation of the Indonesian currency--a move taken over army objections but one that will probably have relatively little effect on the economy and is not likely to help the President politically.

Sukarno's Future

16. Sukarno's demonstrated ability to accommodate himself to changed political circumstances may again assert itself, but, for the moment at least, the President has lost his political touch. Furthermore, as evidence of Sukarno's political deterioration increases, opportunistic Indonesian politicians will feel they have correspondingly less to gain by associating themselves closely with him.

17. Many of the President's political supporters already seem to be fading from the political picture. It is probably only a matter of time until Subandrio is completely eased out of office. A rumored governmental reorganization may remove other prominent figures who have long been close to Sukarno. Minister for People's Relations Ruslan Abdulgani has been given a major position in the reorganized KOTI, but--always an opportunist--he now appears willing to work closely with the army. Third Deputy Premier Chaerul Saleh is also still active, but he too appears anxious to ingratiate himself with the military and has recently been making statements similar in content to those of Nasution and Suharto.

18. The President probably has relatively little time left in which he can work the political magic that over the years kept him at the center of Indonesian affairs. His health is failing. There are also persistent rumors that Sukarno will be entirely "removed

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from the scene" shortly after the first of the year. Many senior army officers believe Sukarno was deeply implicated in the coup attempt. Some--said to include Suharto--seem to have little respect left for the President and possibly would be happy to see him removed from office. However, the gradual reduction of the Presidency to a ceremonial office seems a more likely possibility. This would probably develop from the practical power situation rather than through a legal reorganization. Most military leaders believe that the President is still helpful to them as a symbol of Indonesian unity and of the legitimacy of the new political order. Furthermore, a direct move against Sukarno is perhaps the one action that could split the present unity in army ranks, since some senior officers are still personally loyal to the President.

The Army's Problems

19. Some divisive strains are likely to develop within the army as time passes. Although it is unlikely that they will be serious enough to affect the position of Nasution or Suharto, the strains may yet offer Sukarno an opportunity for renewed maneuvering. The army is also likely to face increasingly hard going in dealing with Indonesia's myriad economic and administrative problems. Although the military leaders have recently been forced to pay considerable attention to economic affairs, there is no sign that they have developed a coherent program to deal with this and other major problems. The military have enlisted the Sultan of Jogjakarta to handle economic affairs within KOTI, but it is unlikely that the generals, preoccupied as they have been with suppressing the PKI and maneuvering vis-a-vis Sukarno, have given much thought to recruiting a civilian cadre to help run the government. Although the military probably expect to achieve a decisive voice in governmental affairs, they presumably would prefer to operate through a facade of top civilian leadership. There is no sign that they are interested in establishing a military dictatorship, although Nasution has been mentioned by several army figures as a possible replacement for Sukarno.

20. However, as the pressure increases to find solutions to Indonesia's many problems--in particular the economic ones--the army may find civilian government to be a luxury it cannot afford. Since power is now

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largely in its hands it is likely to be blamed if solutions to Indonesia's ills are not found, and the military leaders may come to feel that they must take direct action in tackling these problems. The army is already deeply involved in the administration of the country under the emergency regulations now in force.

21. On the basis of its past performance, however, the army is not likely to do well in this area. In the period 1957-1960, when the army had great administrative responsibilities, it found some of these problems almost beyond it. Food collection and distribution became badly snarled and corruption was rife at all levels within the army. The army leadership may have learned something from this earlier adventure, but it is doubtful that the mistakes of the past can be completely avoided.

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